

Cantate (The Fifth Sunday of Easter)
18 May 2025
John 16:5-15 (Isaiah 12:1-6, James 1:16-21)

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—
 Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. John, the sixteenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

Last week, we heard Jesus preparing His disciples for the “little while” between the time of mourning His Good Friday death on the cross and rejoicing in His Easter Sunday resurrection from the dead. This week, we hear Jesus preparing His disciples for another, different “little while”—the ten days between His ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus does indeed “go away” for a little while—even as we await His return in glory. But He doesn't leave us as orphans. He doesn't throw us to the dogs. He sends us help, and not just impersonal help, but a real Helper.

This word translated as “Helper” is the Greek word which we sometimes just pull into English as “Paraklete.” This Paraklete is the one who will come and convict the world concerning “sin and righteousness and judgment.” “Paraklete” is a hard word to translate. It doesn't mean “helper” in the sense of someone who just gives us a little bit of assistance. It is more like someone who comes to your saving aid when you are trapped in a burning building, or who pulls you out of the water as you are drowning. The Paraklete is a life-saver. Sometimes Paraklete is translated as “advocate,” like an attorney who stands up for you and defends you when you are accused. As long as we understand “Helper” in this sense, it's not a bad translation. For the kind of help we're talking about isn't just like a spare set of hands holding a screwdriver for us, it's more like the doctor's hands holding our

beating heart in the middle of a transplant. We cannot live without this Paraklete, dear friends: this Helper, this Advocate, this Holy Spirit who drives out all evil spirits which vex us. Jesus has more to say about this coming Holy Spirit, but “you cannot bear them now,” He says. But “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.”

So even though the disciples will no longer see their Lord face to face as they did before, even though they will no longer be able to hear Him and be present with Him—who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” the Word Made Flesh—in the same way as they did before, the Holy Spirit, the Helper, the Advocate will continue to point them (and us) to Jesus. For the Holy Spirit “will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.”

As we know from Scripture, the Holy Spirit is God. He is neither the Father nor the Son. But He is also not an impersonal force. He is also not a creation of the Father. He is equally God. He is the third person of the Holy Trinity. And yet, look at how He does not draw attention to Himself. Rather, He points us to Christ. “He will glorify Me,” says Jesus, “for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

So many people misunderstand the Holy Spirit and turn Him into a kind of alternative god of personal glory and empowerment. There are groups of Christians who treat the Holy Spirit as if He were their own personal a worker of magic, a superpower independent of the Father and the Son. Some think they are honoring the Holy Spirit when they elevate Him above the Son, or when they begin to speak as though the Spirit reveals things to them apart from Jesus and apart from God’s Word. But, dear friends, the Holy Spirit revealed the Scripture to us, and the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate you through that Word of God. You are not a prophet. I am not a prophet. There are no more prophets. We don’t need any more prophets, because we have the Son and His Word. His Word is final, dear friends. You see, we have something far better than more prophets: the Word. We have

the Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture which testifies of Jesus, who is the Word Made Flesh. Jesus is the one who died for us that we might live, the one who fulfills all of the prophets. Jesus saved us from sin, death, and the devil. Jesus gives us this Good News and shares His body and blood with us. And the Holy Spirit draws you to Jesus and fills you with a desire to hear the Good News which the Holy Spirit Himself inspired: the writings which we call “The Bible.”

Why is the Holy Spirit willing to point us to Jesus instead of Himself? For the same reason that Jesus points us to the Father and is willing to suffer all in obedience to the Father. God is love. The persons of the Holy Trinity are not in competition with one another. They are not jealous of each other. They carry out the one divine will of the one true God, out of love for us, out of love for you.

So, dear brother, dear sister, the Holy Spirit—who was given to you as a gift when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and when you first heard the Good News of the inspired Word of God, your Advocate and Helper—is even better than some kind of genie in a bottle. He is God, and He holds infinite divine power and mercy. He draws you to Jesus. He calls you to be part of His church. He brings you ever closer to the Father. And unlike the spirits of this world and the fallen spirits who follow the devil, this Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who speaks only truth, bringing you to the Truth, the “way the truth and the life,” who is Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our Small Catechism, we summarize what the Spirit-inspired Scripture testifies about the Holy Spirit: “He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

And what beautiful Help this Paraklete gives us, dear friends. We are weak. We are subject to powerful forces which we cannot control. But Jesus doesn’t leave us as orphans or throw us to the dogs. He sends us help. And not just impersonal help, but a real Helper. And as we confess, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him;

but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

The Holy Spirit draws you to Jesus by drawing you into Holy Baptism, to remember your baptism, to remember what Jesus has done for you at the cross. He draws you into the church, dear friends, and “in this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.”

And as for that “little while” between the cross and the resurrection, the Holy Spirit is there too, dear friends. For the “little while” that is death itself will come to an end by the Holy Spirit’s mighty work. For “on the Last Day, He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.”

Yes, indeed, Jesus has sent us help. Jesus has sent us a Helper. And Jesus says, “All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

He is the Spirit of truth. He has come to the world, and He has come to us. “This is most certainly true:” You are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Larry Beane